**Water is free, so why do people pay for it?**

*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic) Inter-County Leader*

We all need water to survive. Without food, we can live three to four weeks; but without water, maybe three to four days at max.

And just how much water do we need each day? It depends on the bodyweight of the person, and whether it is a male or female. An average male, weighing 160 pounds, usually consumes about 3.7 liters (roughly 15.5 cups) a day, while an average female, weighing 130 pounds, consumes about 2.7 liters (roughly 11.5 cups) a day. That’s a lot of water!

Living in the Northwoods, we are very fortunate indeed, as we do not have any problems with our water supplies. We have well water which is naturally purified. I never imagined that I could just turn on the faucet, fill up my glass and start drinking. What a pleasure.

Having lived in different parts of the U.S., we have always had problems with the local water supplies. The worst experience was in San Diego. The supply was from the Colorado River. After many miles of traveling, I wonder just how much grime it picked up on its way.

The water from the faucet looked drinkable at first. However, when you set a glass of water to settle overnight, you would find a thin layer of “stuff” at the bottom the next morning. So, most of the households have purified water delivered to their homes, or have filter systems installed. Just a little extra headache added to the already busy life, no big deal.

I forgot whether it was in Texas or Georgia that in order to protect the public health, chlorine was added to the water supply at no extra cost. I never dreamt that I could quench my thirst and strengthen my teeth at the same time. What a deal.

I first heard about a “bubbler” when we moved to Wisconsin — a gismo in the park where you can get a drink of water when you are thirsty. In a sense, water is free and should be free, right? So, what’s with these bottled waters all of a sudden? That folks would pay good money for something that is free? And it has developed to be a trend and fashionable.

To go to the gym, besides packing the workout clothing, one would put bottled water in the gym bag. And to attend a meeting, either the host would provide a pitcher of water to quench your thirst, or you would carry your own personal bottle. It is mind-boggling to know how many brands are available out there; all claim to be the purest, the healthiest, with an unforgettable taste that lingers.

We are talking about water here! If I ask just what is the difference between Member’s Mark, Aquafina, LIFE WTR, Dasani, Evian, Natural Spring, Crystal Geyser, Nestle, Essential, Fiji Natural Artisan … (did I miss any), can anyone honestly tell me? To me, water is water. Just because the marketing adds a twist to the name, don’t fall for it.

I read about the birth of bottled water, that it started in 1767 at Jackson’s Spa in Boston. The water there was supposed to contain therapeutic properties that could drive away common ailments. Then, in the 19th and 20th centuries, the bottled natural springs water became more popular.

At first, they were available in pharmacies only, but when they started selling them in grocery stores, the market just exploded. It makes sense if the spring waters are really natural and contain “therapeutic properties,” but then many bottling companies were selling water right off the tap after labeling them with some fancy names.

It was phony business, but people were willing to pay good money for it. As long as no one was hurt, what the heck! The scheme finally got caught on to, and those companies were fined and shut down. After they’d already made millions and millions of dollars, those companies simply changed their names and sold other carbonated beverages instead.

When I was working in restaurants in my college days, I remember the once popular bar drink — “Perrier with a squeeze of lime.” It is supposed to be a bottle of carbonated spring water from France. It is beyond me how the water would still be carbonated after all the times of traveling across the ocean. But it did fizz when you poured it into a glass; so, what if it cost more than a drink with real alcohol? People are willing to pay for it.

Ah, the magic of marketing. After all, Perrier is the “Earth’s First Soft Drink.” Later, Pepsi developed Aquafina in 1994, and Coca-Cola followed with Dasani in 1999. Both became successful with loyal followers. Actually, they both served purified water, the water that ran through a purification system before it was sent to make carbonated drinks. I just smiled at those marketing geniuses, how did they come up with those fancy names? Aquafina I can figure out, as aqua is water in Spanish, but Dasani?

I am an average male (well, a little bit above average, but not much), and I do consume my share of water. Maybe sometimes a bit more, but I am willing to pay the price (the frequent trips to the bathroom). Ah, the price to pay to stay healthy!

These days, I carry my own water bottle when I travel, as I refuse to pay the price of bottled water. I know the companies are cost conscientious, but to fill water in bottles that would melt in your hand is just beyond me. So, instead of refilling the bottle, you have no choice but to purchase a new one instead. And, just how much does it cost for the water?

Billions have already been made by just selling water, so what will they think of next? The air that we breathe? I heard that in Tokyo, “a breath of fresh air” is actually sold in a vending machine. I always love the smell of fresh-mowed lawn, wonder where I can get some?